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ABSTRACT

"Understanding World Agriculture" is a 3-year project (1984-1987) designed to mobilize resources of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) to enhance citizen understanding of political, economic, technical, and social factors relating to world problems of hunger and poverty and to the stake of the United States in international development. The project is aimed at CES clientele, which represents a broad cross section of the American public. A handbook for extension personnel was developed in the project's first year, 1984-1985. Activities in the second and third years will focus on the preparation and testing of educational materials based on the handbook, and on training extension personnel in their use. Another project component assessed the current level of institutional support and capacity for an international public education dimension within the Cooperative Extension System of selected Land Grant Universities. Eleven states contributed to the assessment in the winter of 1985-1986. Although the 888 CES staff were basically very supportive of an international dimension for CES, telephone interviews with 28 administrators pinpointed weaknesses in institutional commitment, structure, and capacity for support. Although some CES staff have ventured into international education on their own, these efforts are not sufficient to meet current demands and programming concepts. (JMM)

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INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMING IN THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM

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Abstract

A national project entitled "Understanding World Agriculture" is described and analyzed. An overview of the project is presented first, including its purpose, current and future activities, and project funding and management. Results and implications of a study that was conducted to provide baseline data on the organizational capacity for international programming in selected state extension services is presented next. Finally, educational materials developed for the project are described.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Purpose

"Understanding World Agriculture" is a three-year project (1984-1987) designed to mobilize the resources of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) to enhance citizen understanding of the political, economic, technical, and social factors relating to world problems of hunger and poverty and to the stake of the U.S. in international development. It responds to the Congressional mandate (contained in the Biden-Pell Amendment to the International Security and Development Act of 1980) to the Agency for International Development (AID) to facilitate widespread public discussion, analysis, and review of the issues raised by the 1980 Report of the Presidential Commission on World Hunger.

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The project is aimed at the clientele of the Cooperative Extension Service which represents a broad cross section of the American public. While rural and agricultural people are major Extension client groups, as many urban as rural individuals are served. Extension has worked traditionally with both men and women as well as with youth through 4-H clubs, the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and the Future Homemakers of America (FHA) in secondary schools. The Service has documented that its 15,000 agents reach more than 50 million people each year through direct contact or by radio, television, and printed materials.

Activities

In the first year of the project (1984-1985), a handbook for use by Extension personnel was developed. Part I highlights relevant research on the issues of hunger and poverty, the history of U.S. development assistance with emphasis on agriculture, and the implications for U.S. security and economic well-being. Part II presents guidelines for calculating the impact of development and trade on the agricultural sector of individual states and communities. Part III features a series of case studies of current, effective development education programs and materials, with special reference to those used by Extension.

Toward the end of the year, the participating states hosted regional meetings for leaders of the Cooperative Extension Service in neighboring states to introduce the handbook and encourage initiation of similar projects.

Activities in the second and third years (1985-1987) will focus on the preparation and testing of educational materials based on the handbook and on the training of Extension agents in their use. Participants will also reach out to Extension personnel nationwide through a variety of activities designed to promote integration of development themes into ongoing programs of the Service. Among others, a mini-grant competition will be conducted each year to support the production of local materials in other states.

Project Funding and Management

Activities under this project are funded by a development education grant from the Agency for International Development and by matching contributions of personnel and other items of expense from the Consortium for International Cooperation in Higher Education (CICHE) and the Cooperative Extension Services of the four participating states. CICHE is a private, non-profit corporation comprised of six major higher education associations. One of the members, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC), provides technical coordination for the project in

consultation with a national advisory committee. Staff include Frank H. Klassen, CICHE President; James W. Cowan, Project Director; and Joan H. Joshi, Project Manager. Earl Teeter, Leader, International Programs, USDA Extension Service serves as technical consultant to the project.

Each participating state's staff of the Cooperative Extension Service work with a local advisory committee to carry out the strategies outlined above. The states represent four geographic regions of the United States and they coordinate regional project activities. These states are Georgia, Michigan, Rhode Island and Utah.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY STUDY

Purpose

The purpose of this project component was to assess the current level of institutional support and capacity for an international public education dimension within the Cooperative Extension System of selected Land Grant Universities. The results represent baseline data that will be compared to similar data collected in the future to determine impacts of the total project.

Methods

Eleven states contributed to the assessment: the four participating in the project (Georgia, Michigan, Rhode Island and Utah) and seven randomly chosen from within regions (Vermont, New York, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Indiana, Oregon and New Mexico). The study consisted of two components: 1) a survey of one-third of each state's field staff focusing on attitudes and practices related to international programming; and 2) telephone interviews with spokespersons for the respective CES administrations concerning their state's capacity to support international programming in Extension. The surveys and interviews were conducted in the winter of 1985-1986.

Results

Based on the results of the survey of 888 CES staff from eleven states, Extension field staff are basically very supportive of an international dimension for CES. They feel that it is important to clarify the University's role in international programs and to incorporate an international dimension in regular CES programs. Although they appreciate that not all clientele may be interested in these issues, they feel a sense of responsibility to bring international issues to the awareness of clientele.

A large proportion of CES staff (41%) are pursuing their own self-development about international issues as they characterize state support for training as "poor." Already approximately one-third of field staff are programming to some extent in this area. Yet staff also admit that most programming is sporadic and weak. The two areas of programming strength are in agriculture and 4-H, yet even these programs received very weak ratings of administrative commitment. In most areas of encouragement and training, staff rated the state administrative support as being "poor to fair."

Based on the telephone interviews with 28 administrators, the states in this sample illustrate fundamental weaknesses on all three dimensions studied--institutional commitment, structure, and capacity for support. The four participating states stand out as having more of the necessary ingredients for successful programming than the others, but even then, spokespersons in these states recognize the tenuous nature of their efforts. Among states not affiliated with the project, only half have made progress and then only on some of the elements described in this study. On the whole, much work needs to be done. The presence of the project seems to have had a catalytic effect already--especially among the participating states. The opportunity to network and share resources that CICHE provided in the regional meetings also helped to encourage discussion and recognition of this area of programming for other non-affiliated states.

Discussion and Implications

Public education programming focused on international issues is both a new and an old programming concept in Extension. On one hand Extension has a long history of involving clientele in cross-cultural experiences--hosting international visitors, sponsoring youth, and to some extent, adult exchange programs and involving clientele in appreciating cultural and life-style similarities and differences across societies. Agricultural programs have also included international trade issues in marketing education efforts. These international programming initiatives are widespread across the states.

However, as indicated in the field staff surveys, these efforts are not sufficient to meet current demands and programming concepts. As our interdependence in the world becomes more and more evident, citizens need a better understanding of a wide range of social, economic and politically oriented international issues. We have moved past the cultural awareness stage of programming to a new era of issues analysis and concrete education on international concepts. The most visible of the current issues is international agricultural trade and foreign aid. The farm community is concerned for their very livelihood. The status of international markets and factors influencing those markets are of prime interest to them. Citizens need to understand how the international trade scene is changing and the potential role of developing countries as markets for U.S. products. Yet this type of programming dialog is relatively weak in

Extension. Why? Why has the land grant system not responded sufficiently?

Actually, agricultural trade, per se, is reported as a relatively strong and comprehensive program in most states. But the foreign aid and understanding of international development links are weak. It may be that international themes are bypassed because local staff lack the expertise and confidence to deal with these complex and often controversial issues. Although field staff report that they rely on University and outside expertise, these experts may or may not be available when needed.

When it comes to international issues, field staff have fewer direct channels into the University structure. Most extension specialists are not familiar with international issues themselves. The internationalists on campus are not necessarily readily available to the extension system. Therefore a fundamental weakness in our organizational structure needs strengthening. An international programs office, international contact person, or specific department representatives are useful in facilitating the matching of off-campus need to university expertise. Likewise such linking is needed for staff training, materials preparation and programming support.

The results of these surveys suggest that field agents have positive attitudes toward providing an international dimension in their CES programs. But they also hesitate to take on new commitments. Those who have ventured into the area of programming seem to have taken the initiative themselves. States may need to review how they assign leadership to this area of programming. As with any new program initiative, state leadership is needed to create momentum and efficiency of effort. Field staff indicate a need for resource materials, training, organizational support and programming strategies. A key strategy is to "integrate" these international issues into ongoing efforts. International education can be part of marketing and economic development programs, part of public affairs education, part of leadership development efforts, etc. "Integration" as a programming strategy was only mentioned by one-half of the surveyed states and yet holds the key for overcoming one of the strongest barriers to international programming--that of time constraints. By integrating and incorporating these issues, international programs do not need to compete with other program priorities.

PROJECT MATERIALS

Handbook

A three-part handbook entitled Solving World Hunger: The U.S. Stake[5] has been published. Principal chapters in Part I deal with "The World Food Problem," "The History and Nature of U.S. Foreign Assistance," "U.S. Economic Assistance and International Trade," "Benefits of International Collaboration in Agricultural Research" and "Food Sufficiency and Political Stability." Parts II and III, already described, are aimed at strengthening the capacity for individuals and organizations to use the information in public educational situations.

Slide/Tape

This is a companion to the handbook and graphically highlights major concepts. Six slide sets, one for each chapter and an overview, also are accompanied by a curriculum and discussion guide.

CONCLUSIONS

The potential is great for a strong viable internationally-oriented educational thrust in the Cooperative Extension System. CES has a national networking capacity already facilitating resource sharing; organizational structures within the University system and within Extension potentially capable of catalyzing action; a cadre of professional staff with positive attitudes and feelings of responsibility toward internationalizing extension, and a history of international programming strength in at least two program areas--4-H and Agriculture. The framework is present, but a number of elements which some states are dealing with need attention. Among these are:

1. Lack of administrative action to back verbal commitments.
2. Poorly established lines of responsibility for back-stopping and field support.
3. Lack of staff and educational resource development plans or program.
4. Competition for staff time among more traditional, more familiar programming demands.
5. Poorly articulated educational objectives and/or formulated thrusts in the internationally-oriented area.

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[5] Solving World Hunger: The U.S. Stake, Wennegren, E., Plunkett, D., Smith, N., Furlong, W. and Joshi, J. Seven Locks Press, 1986.